

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# EVICTED

POVERTY AND PROFIT IN  
THE AMERICAN CITY

MATTHEW DESMOND

"Evicted" is the most depressing book I've read in ages. How's that for a blurb to display on the paperback? But hold on -- it's also infuriating, sad, moving, informative, enraging, heartbreaking, suspenseful and just a little at the very end...hopeful. Author Matthew Desmond spent years researching this book by living among the poor people of Milwaukee. By telling the story of men, women and children, the working poor, the elderly, the drug addicts, the recovering addicts, the landlords, the slumlords, the police and pretty much everyone in this world, he shines a light on the devastating impact of evictions on society. Like "The Corner" and "The Wire" and other acclaimed works of narrative nonfiction, "Evicted" illuminates a pressing issue by telling the story of the people it impacts. One paragraph in particular encapsulates for me the driving idea: "If incarceration had come to define the lives of men from impoverished black neighborhoods, eviction was shaping the lives of women. Poor black men were locked up. Poor black women were locked out." With Desmond literally side by side with the people affected, you come to understand the impossible choices they face on a daily basis: pay rent or keep the heat on or buy food? Call 9-11 when your boyfriend or husband is beating you and risk eviction (landlords hate it when the cops are called for various reasons) or let him beat you so you won't be kicked out onto the streets? Go to court to fight a unfair eviction notice and thus miss a shift of work and maybe get fired? Or go to your job and get evicted, which means you'll have to move and probably be farther away from that crappy job and find it harder to get there on time and lose that job anyway? When 80% or 90% of your income goes to rent, inevitably the smallest emergency sets off a chain reaction of minor disasters. Desmond places the crisis of eviction into its historical context: people weren't any poorer a hundred years ago but evictions used to be a rarity and ultimately led to riots in major cities across the country, pitched battles between the working class and the powerful. Now evictions are so common it will take your breath away, leading to countless ills that Desmond shows with story after story. This is an exceptional book that even -- for a while -- had me empathizing with the slum lords, who aren't moustache-twirling villains but ultimately can at best shrug and blame the system for what they do. Desmond proposes ways to combat the eviction crisis. After reading this book, you can't the necessity for action. -- Michael Giltz